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Cross-country bus trip subject of next book club meeting

PIERRE, S.D. -- A journey of a thousand miles starts with one step onto a bus.

Pierre resident Bill Markley stepped onto a bus a few weeks after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks to travel from Pierre to Blacksburg, Va., and back.

American Pilgrim is Markley's lighthearted account of life on the bus, the characters on the bus and the mood of the American people – with a few detours along the route.

Markley will be the guest speaker when the History and Heritage Book Club meets at 7 p.m. CST on Tuesday, Feb. 7, at the Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre, telling about *American Pilgrim*. The meeting is free and everyone is welcome to attend.

"One of the purposes of the History and Heritage Book Club is to read and discuss books by South Dakota and regional authors," said Patricia Miller. "We're pleased to have an author from Pierre come to the book club meeting to tell about his writing. Bill is a member of the Western Writers of America. He has written numerous magazine articles and authored three books. *American Pilgrim* is his third and most recent book."

Miller is the president of the South Dakota Historical Society Foundation, which is the nonprofit fundraising partner of the South Dakota State Historical Society. The foundation and the SDSHS Press sponsor the History and Heritage Book Club.

Markley has made Pierre his home since 1976. He works for the South Dakota Department of Environment and Natural Resources. His cross-country journey began when he decided to attend a fraternity reunion at his alma mater, Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Va. At \$138 round trip, taking the bus seemed the most economical method of transportation.

"I looked on the bus trip as an adventure," Markley said. "You see the country in a different way. When you are riding on a bus, you have to stop where the bus stops. You are soon talking to other people on the bus. You enter into a temporary community you are involved with."

He jotted down notes about life on the bus, his fellow passengers and about the mood of the American people in the weeks following 9/11.

"This was a unique time period in the nation's history," Markley said. "We'd just gone through terrorist attacks. Everyone was thinking of themselves as Americans first. Everyone was looking out for each other."

As Markley worked on the story, he began to add “detours” about past events and people associated with the locations through which the bus was traveling.

The bus trip became a journey into the country’s and his past.

American Pilgrim is available in the Heritage Stores at the Cultural Heritage Center and the Capitol. Book club members receive a 10 percent discount and SDSHS members receive a 15 percent discount when they purchase the book at either Heritage Store.

For more information about the History and Heritage Book Club, call (605) 773-6006.

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The South Dakota Historical Society Foundation is a private charitable nonprofit that seeks funding to assist the South Dakota State Historical Society in programming and projects to preserve South Dakota’s history and heritage for future generations.

The South Dakota State Historical Society is a division of the Department of Tourism. The Department of Tourism is comprised of Tourism, the South Dakota Arts Council, and the State Historical Society. The Department is led by Secretary James D. Hagen. The State Historical Society is headquartered at the South Dakota Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre. The center houses the society’s world-class museum, the archives, and the historic preservation, publishing and administrative/development offices. Call (605) 773-3458 or visit www.history.sd.gov for more information. The society also has an archaeology office in Rapid City; call (605) 394-1936 for more information.